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ABSTRACT

The relationship between student brinkmanship, defined as an assertive student behavior which attempts to challenge school authority while avoiding negative sanctions, and classroom social structure in five secondary school classrooms was investigated through a field study. Subjects were 185 students in a small rural high school in Georgia. Participant observers for the study were the researcher, the school's principal, and the school's reading supervisor, who observed six classes rated as either relatively low or high in robustness, i.e., interesting, challenging, and meaningful. Rated as low robustness or routinized classes were a ninth-grade history class, an eleventh-grade English class, and a beginning typing class, while the high robustness classes were a twelfth-grade physics class, a ninth-grade physical education class, and an eighth-grade English class. Results indicated that: (1) positive rapport between students and teacher, low levels of routinization, and moderate to high levels of teacher legitimacy led to infrequent student brinkmanship; (2) low rapport and teacher legitimacy reduced class effectiveness and efficiency and led to student hostility and institutional sabotage; and (3) low rapport between students and teachers, low teacher legitimacy and low degrees of routinization led to all forms of student brinkmanship. (HLM)

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Student Brinkmanship: Some Field Observations, Findings and Questions

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Student Brinkmanship: Some Field Observations, Findings and Questions

Student resistance against the authority system of the school organization is almost a situational stereotype associated with American educational culture. The picture of a freckled-faced, eight-year old rogue hurling a spitball or doing his impression of a sick bullfrog to the consternation of a rather proper "school marm" type teacher is probably as well loved a part of Americanna as the much heralded hot dogs, baseball and apple pie. Place this nostalgic response next to the public's much publicized concern for better school discipline and one is immediately reminded of the ambivalent attitude our society often has for its organizations and institutions. While many would openly condemn student misconduct, privately they would probably wonder whether or not "red blood" flows through the veins of those students who abstain from such behavior.

Waller (1932) asserted that the student-teacher antagonism is a relationship based on conflicting definitions of the school or classroom situation. Far from being dysfunctional, Waller (1932) contended that conflict preserves relations which might otherwise become intolerable. He noted that it could be argued that conflict is one feature of the school organization which prepares students for the outside world. Certainly, he is not alone in terms of this notion, particuly from the point of view of those educators and leaders who tout the positive consequences that emerge from competition and fighting the "good fight."

Parsons (1959) and Cusick (1973) from somewhat different frameworks have suggested that a major function of the school organization is to socialize students for life in an essentially bureaucratic society. From this frame of reference, one can easily view student resistance to the school's authority system as a type of coping behavior students must learn in order to survive in society. These views tend to place at least some forms of student misconduct in a rather constructive light. Constructive, that is, unless you are a teacher.

Eddy (1967) has maintained that pupils who violate the official norms of social conduct threaten both the authority of the teacher and the attainment of educational goals. The student who mimics the teacher's instructions to other students; the student who is constantly interrupting class to ask permission to go to the lavatory; or the student who blurts out crude language in answer to a teacher's question; were some of the student behaviors observed by her which seemed to contribute to a certain amount of teacher "trauma". Kaufman (1965) has cited a more specific example of this type of student behavior:

> And Ferrone is still testing, testing me, with all the tricks of the trade. He pretends not to hear and keeps asking me to repeat. He drops books loudly, spends a long time picking them up, drops them again. He arrives late and stands gaping in the doorway. He answers me with false humility: "Yes'm, teach, you're the boss."

In response to a morning announcement by the school principal, Greene and Ryan observed the following collective expression of

antogonism in an elementary school in Harlem, New York: "Class is now thumbing noses and throwing fist and finger signs to the amplifier. 'What's he talking about?' 'I can't hear him!' 'I don't wanna hear him!'" Kozol (1951) has described similar behavior in a classroom in Boston, Massachusetts:

> I remember a day in the middle of January in quite cold weather when the teacher went out onto the metal fire escape for a moment for some purpose... and one of the children jumped up and slammed the door. It locked behind him. "let me in!" the man started screaming... the children, not ever having a chance at revenge before, must have been filled with sudden joy. "Let me in! How dare you, etc." At last they relented. Someone opened up the door and let the man back in.

Hardly a unique American experience, Braithewaite (1959), while teaching in a "slum school" in London, England, believed that his relationship with his class passed through three stages: the silent treatment, the noisy treatment, and the bawdy treatment. During the silent treatment students would do any task set for them without question or protest, but equally without interest or enthusiasm. The noisy treatment usually involved a student who would let his desk slam down with a bang while the teacher was talking; the culprit would merely sit up and stare at the teacher with "innocent eyes" as if it were an accident. The bawdy treatment involved the use of crude remarks always in a voice just loud enough for the teacher to hear.

Student Brinkmanship

Some students seem to know exactly how far to go before risking

punishment. Former teacher Charles Wilson (1956) recalled that one student, "... could think of more offenses than Barnum had acts. If you told him to stop throwing spitballs, he threw erasers. I wore out my glances and glares and whammies on him the first month of school", Licata and Willower (1975) have described such behavior as student brinkmanship. Considered in organizational terms, student brinkmanship was described as assertive student behavior which attempts to challenge the school's authority system while avoiding its negative organizational sanctions. Such acts were characterized in the following ways:

1. Student brinkmanship usually takes place in the presence of an audience. It can be understood as a collective experience and without an audience it would be a relatively meaningless act.
2. The student actors typically use creative "disguises" in order to avoid formal negative sanctions. The brinkman who blurts out a rude remark often disguises his act as a mispronounciation much the same way the student who slams his desk shut attempts to disguise the act as an accident.
3. Acts of student brinkmanship are to a large extent improvisations and manifest themselves as extemporaneous social acts. The player usually draws on personal and collective experience and imaginatively fills in the script as he goes along.

4. The student's performance is often satirical in nature and expresses irony, sacasm, humor and distain, particularly in terms of organizational values. As many social critics have known through the ages, a certain amount of protection is accrued through the use of satire and humor. As a result, these acts rarely cause the performers loss of face or punishment of any kind.

While taking care not to suggest any formal style or precision, Licata (1974 and 1978) has posited that there appear to be at least three categories of student brinkmanship. Subversive obedience is rule obeying behavior in which the student follows the rule to the letter or in an exaggerated way in order to use the organization's rules to its own disadvantage. The "mock enforcer" who is quick to mimic the teacher's reproof to a classmate might be an example of this type of brinkmanship. Tight-roping is neither rule obeying nor rule disobeying behavior, but behavior that is difficult to define in terms of specific rules of the organization. Student coughing or laughing in an exaggerated manner is very difficult for the teacher to define in terms of specific rule-breaking. Boundary-testing is rule disobeying behavior which is disguished in some way so that negative organizational sensations are avoided. Students switching "assigned" seats while the teacher turns his back to the class to write on the chalkboard might be an example of this type of brinkmanship.

As Figure 1 depicts, it was suggested that acts of student brinkmanship could be placed on a continuum: acts of passive compliance at one extreme, and acts of aggressive noncompliance at the other extreme. Subversive obedience would represent the most aggressive acts of student obedience, and boundry testing would represent the most passive acts of student disobedience. Tight-roping would be placed somewhere in the middle of the continuum, falling neither under rule obedience nor rule disobdeience (Licata, 1974 and 1978).

A major contribution of the functionalists, Malinowski and Radcliffe Brown in particular, was to point out that much social practice and structure are maintained by their consequences. In a recent attempt to study the relationship between student brinkmanship and school structure, it was proposed that a self-regenerating causal loop often exists whereby the custodial features of the school organization become ends in themselves. It was posited that acts of student brinkmanship occur in response to custodial school routines, that teachers tend to be threatened by such acts, and thereby increase their dependence on the very structural features of the school organization which may have caused their anxiety in the first place (Licata, 1978).

Review of Research

In an initial study of the consequences of student brinkmanship for the school organization, Licata and Willower (1975) suggested that acts of student brinkmanship facilitate student role adjustment by allowing students to "blow off steam" generated by the authority system of the school and routiness of everyday class-

room life. Given this rationale, they predicted that student perceptions of brinkmanship should vary inversely with their perceptions of everyday classroom life; that is students who are more negative about classroom life should be more positive about brinkmanship. This hypothesis was rejected in light of a significant positive correlation (r=.22) which emerged from an analysis of the data.

Further analysis showed that students perceived brinkmanship more positively than classroom life. This was especially true of students holding neutral or negative views of everyday classroom life, but resulted from their negative attitudes about classroom life rather than their positive views of brinkmanship. In fact, students with a positive perception of classroom life were considerably more positive about brinkmanship than their classmates who had less positive attitudes of the classroom.

As a result of these findings, the authors concluded that the relationship between classroom life and brinkmanship is more complex than first thought. They speculated that for some students, brinkmanship may be an integral part of classroom life and their assessments of both may be interwoven. Others, they suggested may be sufficiently alienated from school so that the comic relief afforded by brinkmanship is lost on them, "eclipsed by their environmental estrangement".

A second hypothesis in the study (Licata and Willower, 1975) posited that acts of student brinkmanship would be perceived by

teachers as a threat to their social position in the school. Keeping this in mind, they predicted that acts of student brinkmanship would be perceived more positively by students than by their teachers. This predicted significant difference was supported by the data produced from the total sample and all relevent subsamples. Based on this finding, the authors concluded that this analysis of the data indirectly supported their initial contention.

A third hypothesis suggested that the degree to which teachers perceive acts of student brinkmanship as threatening to their social position in the school organization is likely to be related to the degree of rigidity or custodialism in their views on pupil control. They (Licata and Willower, 1975) predicted that teachers who are relatively custodial in their pupil control ideology will tend to perceive acts of student brinkmanship with a greater degree of dysphoria than teachers more humanistic in their pupil control ideology. The analysis of the data produced a significant positive correlation (r=.33) between teacher dysphoria over student brinkmanship and teacher rigidity or custodialism in their attitudes about pupil control. While teachers exhibited negative attitudes about student brinkmanship, influenced in part by their concern for pupil control, the investigators speculated that brinkmanship may have positive consequences for the teacher role. They suggested that it is quite possible that student brinkmanship acts as a functional equivalent for more serious forms of student misconduct, and as such, fosters stability in the school organization.

In a later study of the relationship between student perceptions of their teacher's pupil control behavior, the perceived robustness or drama of the teacher's pupil control behavior and the perceived robustness or drama of student brinkmanship (Brown and Licata, 1978), it was posited that in classrooms where the teacher's pupil control behavior is perceived by students as being custodial, both the teacher's pupil control behavior and acts of student brinkmanship tend to be perceived by students as being relatively high in drama or robustness. Since students probably find it relatively easy to empathize with a classmate embroiled in conflict with a teacher, both the observation of a classmate risking punishment through acts of brinkmanship and the potential teacher response were thought to be inherently dramatic behaviors in terms of the perceptions of the student audience. The robustness construct was operationalized in terms of adjectives like: interesting, fresh, meaningful, important, unusual, powerful, active, thrilling, action-packed and challenging (Licata and Willower, 1978).

Based on the findings of this study, the investigators suggested that student perceptions of their teachers' response to misconduct like student brinkmanship tended to be more robust than the perception of the misconduct itself, a finding which lends some support to previous speculation (Licata and Willower, 1975, and Willower and Licata 1975) about the relatively robust nature of student-teacher antagonism. In terms of the central question

addressed in this research, the subsequent analysis of the data suggested that the more custodial a teacher's pupil control behavior, the more robust are acts of student brinkmanship, the less robust is the teacher's pupil control behavior, and the more the teacher is disliked by students. Possibly, the authors noted, in those cases where custodial teacher behavior results in rigid classroom routines, the risk and robustness inherent in acts of student brinkmanship increase, but in such a social setting these acts are probably rare and student tedium may result in negative student attitudes about their teacher. Given the relatively weak relationship which emerged these investigators were careful to emphasize the tentative nature of the findings (Brown and Licata, 1978).

Purpose

Initial research findings about student brinkmanship have been inconsistent and unanticipated at times and have probably raised as many questions as they have answered. These findings underline the tentative nature of initial supeculation about their meaning as well as the investigators' suggestion that the relationship between student brinkmanship and school social strucutre is more complex than initially predicted. This conclusion is not unlike Waller's (1932) contention, viewing the school as a small society or social system, that social conflict in general and the student-teacher antagonism in particular are relatively complex instances of social interaction. The initial student brinkmanship investigations were necessarily limited in terms of

sample, theoretical variables and operational definitions and inevitable questions must be considered about the adequacy of these methodological components. Certainly, there is a need for further inquiry and clarification of the relationships and variables previously studied. Perhaps, it is time to involve a degree of methodological triangulation (Denzin, 1970) as a means of overcoming, to some extent, the limitations of previous studies and as a means of gaining some clarification of the relationship between student brinkmanship and school structure. The field study method, employed previously by researchers such as Becker (1961), Eddy (1967), Burnett (1969), Cusick (1973) and Wolcott (1973), might be a fruitful tool for the generation of new insights about student brinkmanship as well as possible clarification of relationships proposed initially.

The purpose of this paper is to report findings which emerged from a field study of selected secondary school classrooms and to present a set of hypotheses about the relationship between student brinkmanship and classroom social structure which may be useful stimuli for further empirical investigations.

The Field Study Method

Wolcott (1970) in a discussion of the methodology he employed in the observation of an elementary school principal, noted that Zelditch's (1962) term "field study" is a useful label primarily because Zelditch makes the case for the participant observer approach without going to the extreme of insisting that participant obser-

vation entails only participating and observing. Willower (1968) described a field study methodology which he and associates employed in a junior high school organization:

> Our techniques were primarily observation and interview. Observations were made in the faculty lounge, in the corridors, in the cafeteria, in classrooms, in the assembly, and in faculty and administrative meetings. Interviews ranged from those that are quite structured to almost casual conversations. Frequently, interviews were conducted to follow-up on clues and hunches that grew out of earlier observations and interviews. We kept a journal in which we recorded our field notes. It included observational and interview data and our own reactions to the data, often from a common sense perspective but sometimes in more refined theoretical terms. We tried to maintain an on-going dialogue between the descriptive and conceptual with explanation as our eventual goal.

The field study method employed in this study bears a considerable amount of similarity to those employed by Wolcott (1970) and Willower (1968). The role of participant observer was flexibly rather than rigidly applied. Field notes contained observation and interview data along with the investigator's reactions to the data. These notes were kept in a journal and reviewed regularly to articulate possible relationships between descriptive and conceptual interpretations of the data.

The investigator conducted the field study in five secondary school classrooms in a small rural high school in Georgia. The student enrollment was 185 students in grades eight through twelve. The students represented a variety of socio-economic backgrounds with the majority of the students coming from families with

relatively low income levels. The racial composition of the school was predominantly black. There were eleven teachers and one principal on the professional staff. The building and facilities were quite old and in poor repair, at least partly because the school was to be closed at the end of the year due to desegregation and consolidation pressures in the school district. Traditional grade levels and subject areas characterized the school's instructional pattern. The study was conducted during April and May, 1978.

This researcher's observations were made as part of a somewhat broader study to examine the relationship between student perceptions of environmental robustness and classroom social structure (Licata and Wildes, 1979). With respect to this larger study, the researcher served as one of three observers in a field study team. The other two observers, the school's principal and the school district's reading supervisor made their observations from the role of "participants as observers." That is, these observers had membership in the system before the study was undertaken and therefore were able to interact naturally with teachers and students. They had access to hidden agendas, motives and meanings which might not be readily noted by an outsider (Lutz and Iannecone, 1969). As the third member of the team, a member of the faculty of educational administration at a local college, I observed from the role of "nonparticipant as observer" with the advantage of an outsider's detachment yet the freedom to consult with the team members who were system participants and able to explain the inside or hidden meanings which were not readily avialable to me. Because of my

interest in the brinkmanship construct and in addition to my duties on the field study team, I was able to concurrently make observations of occurances of student brinkmanship and their relationship to the structural features of classroom organization. In a way it was a study within a study, a chance to gather additional data about student brinkmanship while serving as an observer in a larger investigation.

Definitions

In analyzing the data, works by Helsel and Willower, (1974), Willower, Eidell and Hoy (1973), Merton (1968), Fiedler (1965), and Getzel and Guba (1957) were particualrly helpful in describing theoretical constructs and relationships. Prior to discussing the findings from this field study and as a way of clarifying termonology, the following terms are defined as follows:

Rapport:

Is the degree of mutual liking between a leader and subordinates applied previously by Fiedler (1965) as a variable in the explanation of group and leadership effectiveness. Here the construct is applied to the relationship between teacher and students in a classroom setting.

Legitimacy:

Is the perception of subordinates that the individual in the leadership role is the lawful, rightful or proper leader. In this case, the term is applied to student perceptions of their teacher.

Routinization:

The degree of standardization in organizational structures. Standardized items are both patterned and repetitive in nature (Merton, 1968). Bidwell (1959) has described routinization in school organizations in terms of universal treatment of clients with respect to organizational sanctions, age-grade placement of students and batch processing of students from one grade level to another. Classrooms are also standardized and provide a fairly constant social context. Another aspect of the standardization experienced by students is the ritualistic and cyclic nature of activities in the classroom. Each activity, "seatwork", "lectures", "group projects" occur with precision. These activities are accompanied by a grading system and rules which students are expected to respect (Jackson, 1968).

Custodial:

Is an adjective used to describe teacher ideology (Willower Eidell and Hoy, 1968) and behavior (Helsel and Willower, 1974) with regard to pupil control. Custodial teacher behavior and classroom routines emphasize external and coercive control of student behavior.

Humanistic:

Is an adjective employed to describe teacher ideology (Willower, Eidell and Hoy, 1968) and behavior (Helsel and Willower, 1974) with regard to pupil control. Humanistic teacher behavior and classroom routines emphasize a belief in the students ability

to be self-controlled and responsible.

Effectiveness:

Is a consequence of the congruence of observed behavior with formal role expectations (Getzel and Guba, 1957). An indirect standard of classroom effectiveness in this field study was this observer's perception of the degree to which the class remained on task.

Efficiency:

Is a consequence of the congruence of behavior with individual need despositions (Getzel and Guba, 1957). An indirect measure of classroom effieiency in this field study was this observer's perception of the degree to which students felt their personal needs were being met by participating in class activities. Student interviews were particularly helpful in operationalizing this variable.

Student Brinkmanship:

As noted earlier in the paper, is assertive student behavior which attempts to challenge the school's authority system while avioding its negative sanctions. In this study the unit of analysis is the classroom rather than the entire school organization.

Adjustive Brinkmanship:

Refers to acts of student brinkmanship which result from student resistance or hostility to role expectations. Getzel and Guba (1957) note that when an individual performs up to role expectations, he/she is said to be adjusted. "Forgetting"

books or pencils, disruptive noises, the pretense of not hearing the teacher, or "accidents" may be examples of this type of brinkmanship. In an industrial plant, this might be called "industrial sabbatoge" (Gouldner, 1954).

Integrative Brinkmanship:

Refers to acts to student brinkmanship which result form the student's desire to fulfil personal need dispositions not satisfied by participation in formal class activities. Getzel and Guba (1957) note that the person who is able to fulfil all his/her needs is integrated. Pretending to confer with a friend about studies in order to chat awhile, brinking the lavoratory pass system to escape for a break, getting up occaisionally to sharpen a pencil as a way of breaking a "boring routine" maybe possible examples. Certainly adjustive and integrative brinkmanship overlap somewhat from one act to another.

The Classrooms

Six (6) classes were selected for the field study because they were rated relatively high or low in robustness by students and teachers alike. High Robustness classes were rated relatively "interesting", "challenging", "thrilling," "meaningful", "active", "powerful", "unusual","fresh", "action-packed", and "important". Low robustness classes were rated relatively "boring", "dull," "quieting", "meaningless", "passive", "weak", "usual", "stale", "uneventful", and "unimportant". The central outcome of the larger field study of classroom robustness was the hypothesis that robustness is inversely related to the degree of classroom organ-

izational routinization, the more robust the class, the less routinized the class. (Licata and Wildes, 1978). A 9th grade history class, an 11th grade English class and a beginning typing class were the low robustness or routinized classes; and a 12th grade physics class, a 9th grade physical education class, and an 8th grade English class were the high robustness or the less routinized classes. While these classes were selected on the basis of perceived differences in the robustness variable, the focus of the description and analysis of these classrooms will be the relationship between student brinkmanship and the structural features of classroom organization, particularly those constructs noted in the preceding section of this paper.

The 9th Grade History Class:

On quick inspection, the class was composed of 22 students, approximately 80% black students. The class, the teacher claimed, was the "slow goup". Students were seated in rows which were perfectly straight. The teacher stood at the head of the class, never smiling, almost "guard-like" in appearance. The blackboards on two walls were covered with the teacher's handwriting and when students arrived, they sat down immediately and began silently copying off of the blackboards. There was little explanation of task by the teacher the students seemed to know exactly what was expected of them and the pupil control demension of this instructional pattern was apparent. The scene was somewhat reminiscent of monks at a monastary transcribing the scriptures. This pattern

was repeated daily.

The blackboard was old, faded and very difficult to read, but students were allowed to shift seats quietly to get a better view. As they did this shifting, the teacher immediately and sternly gazed at the students to make sure they did not abuse the privilage. Control problems were nonexistent; students dared not misbehave, a paddle sat conspicuously on top of the teacher's desk as a grim reminder of the possible consequences of misconduct. Silence was maintained by both the students and the teacher.

This custodial atmosphere was highly structured, patterned and repetitive. The teacher's comments, "Make your letters distinct and legible", or "Make sure the magazines are straight", emphasized the formality of classroom organization. The bulletin board read, " The other basics self confidence, self reliance and self discipline", yet classroom patterns tended to be coercive and based on external control of students. The bulletin board did not change and neither did the teacher's dress, each day he wore a kaki shirt and trousers, the same color, gray, over and over again. The instructional materials were always two-dimensional, "bookish", emphasizing a strict routine of paperwork.

Student brinkmanship was infrequent and very mild: getting up to sharpen a pencil and milking it for all the time it was worth; yawning just loud enough to be heard but not enough to deserve punishment; in fact, at the end of each class period all the students in the back row would stretch in unison as they got

up to leave. The acts of brinkmanship were rare and seemed to be individual forays designed to break the tedium of what students later called "a boring routine". This type of brinkmanship, integrative brinkmanship, appeared to be relatively harmless behavior designed to provide for personal need despositions, like stretching, moving around, or breaking the monotony. It did not appear to express any overt hostility toward the teacher or classroom structure.

In interviews with students, somewhat suprisingly the students voiced praise for the teacher as a person and as an instructor. Some said he was the best teacher in the school. They thought that he really believed in their ability to learn, cared about them getting an education, and they interpreted the "boring classroom routine" as a manifestation of these sentiments. There appeared to be a positive rapport between students and teacher. The teacher's legitimacy with the group was very high in terms of both formal authority and student confidence in his leadership. When asked about the possibility of student misconduct in the class, they suggested the prospect was unthinkable for two reasons: the high risk of sure and swift punishment, and his positive relationship with the class.

The 11th Grade English Class:

This class was composed of 17 11th and some 12th grade students. Half of the class, black males, sat at the rear of the classroom, while the other half of the class, predominantly white females,

sat in the front of the room. The class was further divided into diads and triads, and in comparison to the history class, was conspicuous in terms of the way students were loosely scattered around the room. Lack of cohesiveness was highlighted as one black student asked another black student for a pencil, the second student refused, seemingly pleased over his classmates's predicament. The teacher openly expressed his dissatisfaction with the class in general and the group of black students in particular. As he confided to this observer, "I wasn't predjudiced before I came here, but now I am. They're just a bunch of ..." The class was marked not only by a lack of rapport between students and teacher, but between students themselves.

Class would begin with a regular expression of hostility between students in the back of the class and the teacher over their failure to bring books or pencils to class. He would deal with them sarcastically and remind them that graduation was close and that he couldn't care less about whether or not they passed. They would place their heads on the desk and pretend to go to sleep or shuffle around looking for materials. As soon as this ritual ended, instruction began and clearly was perceived as a chore by both teacher and students. In many ways, the routines were as rigid as in the history class and if something began to stir student interest, the teacher would immediately cut-off the activity. Students were often openly hostile toward assignments, when asked to write a description of a laundramat, one girl remarked, "can't we do something more interesting?" A week later,

when asked by this observer how she did on the assignment, she responded, "I don't know, he still hasn't handed it back." In interviews with students, they were relatively critical of his role as a teacher. While his formal legitimacy was buttressed by his rather rigid and custodial control style, informally his legitimacy was in question due their doubt that he cared about their progress and learning.

Brinkmanship, which is called [illegible] adjustive brinkmanship, was a definite expression of hostility over their role expectations as students, almost "instructional sabotage", i.e., pretending to forget books and materials, moving ever so slowly to perform classroom tasks, exaggerated laughing, or "accidents" in which books or furniture were knocked over and slowly picked-up. Here again at the end of class, those in the rear simultaneously stretched and yawned, then left for the next class.

The Begining Typing Class:

This class, approximately 15 students, both black and white, male and female, was highly routinized. The task was typing assignments from a workbook. There was little interaction between students and very rarely did students leave their seats. Many students, even though it was the end of the year, pecked away diligently with only one finger. On the blackborad, "18 days left in school," seemed more to be a reminder of the time left to finish tasks required for a passing grade than as an expression of mutual anticipation of summer vacation. The teacher, a substitute

hired to complete the year for the previous typing teacher who was on sick leave, stalked the class with the same kind of custodial demeanor as the history and English teachers noted above.

While this class was not observed as often as the other classes, except for the exaggerated stretching and yawning at the end of the class which was characteristic by now, the frequency and intensity of student brinkmanship was low. As was the case in the history class, long pencil sharpening trips or "borrowing" something from the classmate seated nearby seemed to be rare integrative forms of brinkmanship aimed at relieving personal discomfort over the tedium of classroom routine. There was little hostility between teacher and students, in fact a positive rapport was apparent in student interviews, even though, as a substitute, her legitimacy was in question. The only complaint heard was that many students were enrolled because there were no other alteratives for that period. As with the history class, students thought the routine was boring, but a necessary and expected part of everyday life.

The 9th Grade Physical Education Class:

This class of 15 female students, an equal mix of black and white, were clearly the organizers and participants of class activities. The classleader, known as "gorilla", a fine athlete, ran the games. The games were marked by enthusiastic involvement, applause, peer reprimands over poor play and competition. Students kept score and administered rules by concensus. The teacher, a male, sat quietly on the sidelines and only spoke to settle rare

disputes. A young EMR student would walk in regularly, and mop the floor of the gym. His reward was a chance to play for a moment at the end of class after some of the girls left to "clean-up". "Clean-up" meant a smoking or conversation break in the locker room the last five (5) minutes of class. The teacher knew about the smoking but ignored it even though it was against school rules. There was a common trust and understanding between the teacher and students. He commented that this class was his best. The class was very informal, but students ardently participated, and the routine was constantly broken by the excitement of the play. The legitimacy of the teacher was high, particularly in view of the fact that he had just coached one of the girls to a third place finish in the two-mile run at the state-wide track meet. His humanistic style made him a quasi-member of the student group. The "clean-up" was the only form of brinkmanship observed, probablyintegrative in nature, and not an expression of hostility over classroom structure.

The 12th Grade Physics Class:

The teacher of this class was a soft spoken, easy-going type who reminded this observer of a shop foreman as he moved from one lab table to another giving advice about experiments as necessary. A small group of students composed the classroom clientele and worked from lab manuals. The teacher rarely lectured, he felt, "long letures are boring, I only lecture for a few minutes to give important information." It was clear as he moved from table to table that he was the legitimate leader in the class and students (mostly white students with an equal mix of male and female)

readily accepted his advise. The class was to a degree a social gathering. As students worked, they chatted with their partner and with others at adjacent tables. The chemicals and equipment were loosely scattered around the room, but the teacher always seemed to find what was needed.

Brinkmanship in this setting usually involved making "mistakes" in mixing chemicals to precipitate an unusual reaction or "explosion" that they could have fun with. One girl talked without a break, day after day, weakly pretending a discussion about the experiment. The teacher would politely remind her to get back to work, but the girl would usually pretend not to hear, think of other excuses to talk or ignore his comments. Typically, brinkmanship in this rather humanistic setting was integrative in nature, relatively mild and again related more to individual needs and desires than to any hostile relationship between student and teacher.

The 8th Grade English Class:

This class, predominantly black students, was chaotic and dominated by student misconduct. The full range and intensity of brinkmanship acts took place frequently. Brinkmanship appeared in both adjustive and integrative forms. The teacher was in his first year of teaching, serving as a substitute for a teacher on leave. He readily admitted the chaos was his fault. He was unable to control the class. The class obviously viewed his position in the class as being low in legitimacy. Once he walked by this observer's seat and said with some bravado, "Watch this,

you are going to see a paddling." He caught the students red-handed, but they soon talked him out of the spanking and as he turned to go back to his desk, they mocked him. He appeard to be just too nice to take a firm stand with the students. He was a great foil for their antics, and rewarded their classroom work with comic books to read at the end of the period. There was a lack of structure, and any attempt by the teacher to restore the routine was quickly thwarted by student misconduct.

Analysis of the Data

Figure 2 contains a summary of the observations made in the six (6) classrooms. In analyzing these data, the variables, rapport, legitimacy and routinization, similar to Fiedler's (1965) liking, legitimacy and structure, were helpful units of analysis. The analysis is divided into two (2) parts: a discussion of the general relationship between student brinkmanship and the structural features of classroom organization, and a discussion of a pair of hypotheses relevent to certain situations which produce a variation in the frequency and intensity of brinkmanship.

The Observed Relationships:

The first set of circumstances, viewed in the history class, the physical education class, the physics class, and to a degree, the typing class, can be characterized by positive rapport between students and teacher, moderate to high levels of teacher legitimacy, and relatively high or low levels of routinization. In classrooms where this combination of factors were present, class effectiveness

and efficiency wer ervable, at least in terms of on-task time and student feelin at to some degree their personal needs were being met. In thes circumstances, student brinkmanship was an infrequenct and relatively mild manifestation of student misconduct. It tended to be predominantly integrative and related to the students' need to move around a little, visit with friends or to break the monotony of the routine. There appeared to be little hostility about classroom routine or occurrences of teacher custodialism, rather students viewed it as "just business and nothing personal", particularly since in these cases the class felt that the teacher had their best interests at heart. Teachers, while on guard about mild forms of brinkmanship, seemed to sense the functional aspect of these acts for the class social system. It served to help students adapt to the routine, but a routine they generally supported. In this context, the positive correlation between student perceptions of brinkmanship and everyday classroom life which emerged in the first brinkmanship investigation (Licata and Willower, 1975) is clarified somewhat.

The second set of circumstances, viewed in the 11th grade English class, can be characterized by relatively low levels of teacher-student rapport and teacher legitimacy, and relatively high levels of routinization. In this case, the low rapport and legitimacy apparently reduced class effectiveness and efficiency but teacher control of students was maintained to a degree by rigid routinization and custodial teacher behavior. Students were

coerced through the sanctions inherent in the grading system and the powers inherent in the teacher role, into a moderate amount of on-task time. However, their doubts about whether or not their personal needs were being met were great. Brinkmanship in this setting, predominantly adjustive brinkmanship, expressed student hostility toward the teacher and the classroom organization, sometimes in the form of "instructional sabotage". In contrast to the previous examples, student-teacher antagonism was obvious and "not just business but rather personal too." Like other students who held neutral or negative attitudes about classroom life and brinkmanship (Licata and Willower, 1975), students in this class found little joy in any aspect of classroom life; and this was true even for the teacher.

One common condition present in the cases mentioned in the first two set of circumstances was the relatively low to moderate frequencies and intensities of brinkmanship produced in these classrooms. The third set of circumstances to be considered, viewed in the 8th grade English class, was characterized by low or abivalent rapport between students and teacher, low teacher legitimacy and low degrees of classroom routinization. Teacher pupil control behavior seemed to move from custodial to humanistic, but rarely did it effectively establish control. The effectiveness of the class, in terms of on-task time was not readily observable. Efficiency could only be described as students' hedonistic pursuit of personal needs and desires with little or no regard for

formal student role expectations. Brinkmanship in this setting abounded, virtually all forms and examples thrived. Adjustive and integrative types were both visable, but were much more difficult to define as such in a setting which could almost be described as a "three-ring circus" of student brinkmanship.

Some Hypotheses

Student brinkmanship in the first set of circumstances, the majority of the classes observed, seemed to be a natural and integral part of everyday classroom life; manifested in acts which were relatively infrequent and mild. In a setting in which teacher-student rapport and teacher legitimacy were strong positive factors of classroom life, the degree of routinization did not appear to impact differentially on class effectiveness and efficiency or on the incidence of student brinkmanship. Stated as a general hypothesis or proposition:

> H_1: In classrooms in which teachers have high rapport and legitimacy with students, organizational effectiveness and efficiency as well as mild forms of student brinkmanship exist in a relatively functional relationship with varying degrees of organizational routinization.

Since the first general set of circumstance or conditions did not reflect a great deal of variability in the relationship between student brinkmanship and classroom structure, let's consider the remaining cases in terms of a hypothesis which speculates about the relationship between classroom structure and brinkmanship when the conditions of positive teacher rapport and legitimacy are reduced:

H_2: In classrooms in which teachers have low rapport and legitimacy with students, organizational routinization, effectiveness and efficiency are inversely related to the frequency and intensity of student brinkmanship.

While the classes noted in this hypothesis may never enjoy the levels of effectiveness and efficiency that can be realized in classes in which rapport and legitimacy are positive factors, a teacher's only ally in the face of reduced rapport and legitimacy may be classroom routinization. In the 11th grade English class, the teacher managed a degree of effectiveness if not efficiency by enforcing relatively rigid routiness. The 8th grade English teacher who did not enforce routinization was not as effective or efficient. While neither situation is probably desirable in terms of the goals of the class organization, this set of conditions may provide insight about the relationship between student brinkmanship and classroom structure.

Given the perception by students that they neither respect the legitimacy of the teacher nor do they have a positive rapport with him/her, as feelings of frustration over their ability to succeed in their role or meet their own needs decreases, the more frequent and intense will be the occurance of student brinkmanship. This appeared to be the case in both English classes. The 11th grade English teacher reduced the incidence of brinkmanship by sticking to routine and demonstrating some degree of effectiveness in terms of on-task time. Still, brinkmanship in this class occurred and with a degree of hostility, perhaps over the relatively low degree

to which the teacher was able to meet student needs, Again, in the 8th grade English class, effectiveness and efficiency were almost nonexistent, at least in terms of possible class goals, and brinkmanship abounded.

When the teacher must manage a spoiled identity in terms of rapport and legitimacy, he/she is the natural target of the student brinkmanship and must resort to custodial behavior and routinization as almost a survival mechanism in these curcumstances, to reduce structure and routinization may be like bleeding in the presence of sharks. Something the 8th grade English teacher apparently experienced all year long.

Conclusion

The field study described in this paper was subject to numerous limitations and hence the findings and generalizations which emerged from the study should be considered as tentative. The sample classrooms and school, antiquated, rural, very samll, predominantly black and about to be phased out due to desegregation and consolidation pressures, may not be representive of other schools and classrooms in general. The observations, approximately six per classroom, made as part of a larger study, were limited by lack of formal preparation as well as the relatively small sample of observations upon which generalizations were based. Further, operational definitions were limited. For instance, time on-task, informally observed, was hardly an adequate measure of effectiveness. In the typing class, those students pecking away conscientiously with one or two fingers were on-task, but

hardly effective in terms of formal organizational expectations for students. While these and other limitations are recognized, the resulting hypotheses maybe worthwhile, if only as cadavers to be disected in future inquiries.

In the initial brinkmanship paper Donald Willower and I (1975) speculate that:

> Just as certain individuals maybe brinkable prone, perhaps the phenomenon is more likely to occur in certain kinds of organizations. Brinkmanship theory may find application in hospitals, prisons, industry, the military, and the family. In addition, there is the possibility of applying it to different organizational positions. What about teacher brinkmanship with respect to the authority system of the school organization?

The generalized nature of this symposium underlines the possible fruitfulness of specifying theoretical constructs both in terms of sample variables, i.e., teacher and student brinkmen or in terms content variables, i.e., legitimacy and routinization. To facilitate this type of specification, to maintain the tradition of our first investigation, and as a possible stimulus for inquiries using a wide range of theoretical variables and organizational settings, the hypotheses stated earlier in this paper will be restated here as general propositions. This specification strategy is similar to one suggested many years ago by Donald Willower (1963) in a discussion of the form of knowledge and the theory-practice relationship. These propositions are stated as follows:

Proposition One (1):

> In social systems in which superordinates have high rapport and legitimacy with subordinates, organizational effectiveness and efficiency as well as mild forms of subordinate brinkmanship exist in a relatively functional relationship with varying degrees of organizational routinization.

Proposition Two (2):

> In social systems in which superordinates have low rapport and legitimacy with subordinates, organizational routinization, effectiveness and efficiency are inversely related to the frequency and intensity of subordinate brinkmanship.

These propositions appear to be consistent with much of the earlier findings about the relationship between school structure and student brinkmanship. The positive relationship between everyday classroom life and brinkmanship (Licata and Willower, 1975) appears to make some sense in terms the relationship posited in the first hypothesis. Teachers apparently take brinkmanship more seriously than students, (Licata and Willower, 1975) even in cases of positive rapport and legitimacy, perhaps in response to the norms of the teacher subculture relevant to pupil control. Certainly, as the first hypothesis suggests, for teachers who have positive rapport and legitimacy, a wide range of functional alternatives maybe productive and experimentation to find the most desirable alternative for instruction is clearly possible.

Some questions, as the title to this paper suggests, are offerred here for possible consideration in future inquiry. What are the variables which impact differentially on rapport and

legitimacy? It has been suggested here that teachers who must manage a spoiled identity with students, usually survive through rigid control and routinization. How can these teachers move from survival to positive changes in identity and practice? Even more important than these somewhat precipitous questions, can these hypotheses be operationalized and tested empirically? If so, will they confirm, modifiy or contradict the generalizations suggested here? The pursuit of answers to these questions is challenging, but the outcomes of such inquiry may hold important implications for productive educational change.

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Classroom	Rapport	Legitimacy	Routinization	Effectiveness	Efficiency	Brinkmanship
History (9)	Positive	High	High/Custodial	On-task time high	Students feel needs met	Low frequency & intensity/integrative.
Physical Education (9)	Positive	High	Low/Humanistic	On-task time high	Students feel needs met	Low frequency & intensity/integrative.
Physics (12)	Positive	High/ Moderate	Low/Humanistic	On-task time moderate	Students feel needs met	Low frequency & intensity/integrative.
Typing (11)	Positive	Moderate	High/Custodial	On-task time high	Students feel needs met to moderate degree.	Low frequency & intensity/ integrative.
English (11)	Negative	Low/ Moderate	High/Custodial	On-task time moderate	Students feel needs not met	Moderate frequency and intensity/adjustive.
English (8)	Ambivalent	Low	Low/Custodial Humanistic Ambivalence	On-task time low	Students are hedonistic	High Frequency and intensity/ adjustive and integrative

Figure 2: A Summary of Classroom Observations.

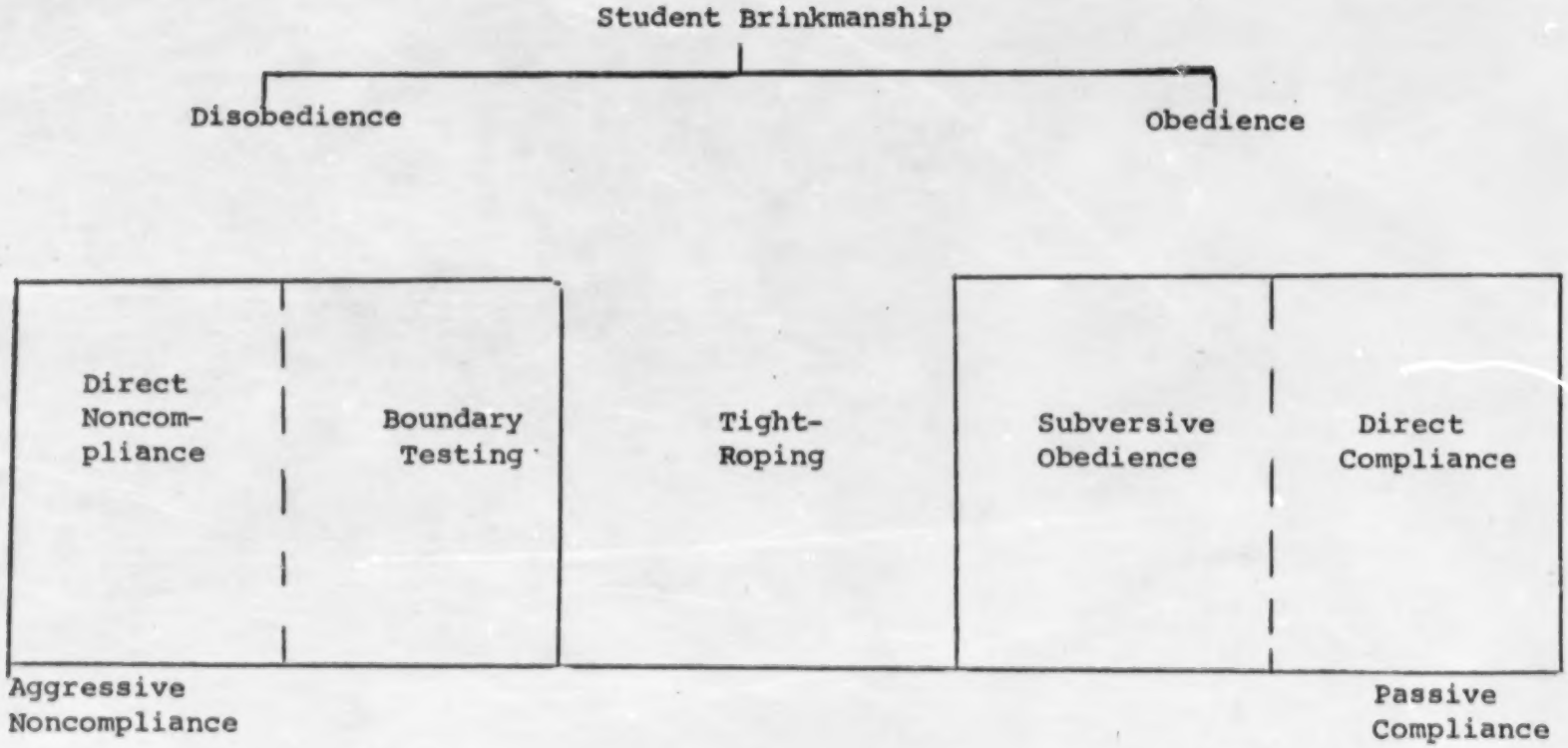

Figure 1. Compliance Continuum.